

B. C. STUDIES

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VANCOUVER COMMUNITY COLLEGE, LANGARA

Understanding the CCF

No. 1 HOW THE CCF
BEGAN

Issued by the Provincial Education Committee
C.C.F. (B.C.-Yukon Section) 1953.

"HOW THE CCF BEGAN"

How it came to be formed at Regina.

Who was there, and why?

What did they do?

Text by: Grace MacInnis.

"THE CCF TODAY"

The Constitution - what are the National & Provincial Executives and Councils - where do the rank and file come in?

The whys and wherefores of organization.

Text by: Jessie Mendels.

"THE REGINA MANIFESTO"

The preamble to the Regina Manifesto is a socialist document - indicates the CCF is part of a world wide socialist movement.

Text by: Dr. J.M. Thomas.

"SOCIALISM"

The socialist idea:

Schools of thought - the historical tradition.

Text by: Alex MacDonald.

"SOCIALISM AND DEMOCRACY"

Our opponents say socialism leads to bureaucracy and regimentation. - is this true? Is there room for individualism?

Text by: Frank Showsell.

"KNOW THE CCF PROGRAM"

The practical application of socialist principles. Significant planks from the CCF Provincial and Federal programs.

Text by: Frank McKenzie.

"HOW THE CCF BEGAN"

SUGGESTIONS TO THE CHAIRMAN

The material in this booklet is historical - we are giving you the story of the beginning of the CCF. Historical facts are not really "discussible". But you do want participation from the group. We suggest the Chairman outline the scope of the whole course and tell the group what will come later. This gives the Chairman the chance to warm up the group with an inspiring little speech about the meaning of the CCF.

Now start by getting one of your group to read the first paragraph - then ask for questions and comment. We are suggesting some questions. The purpose of these is to get participation - so that the group get talking. There will be people in the group who will remember the depression - this is a good chance to let them talk about it. The stories they tell will indicate well enough why the CCF was formed at that time. Don't try, in this first one, to get too technical about the causes of the depression. This is an introduction, remember. You can talk about the analysis of capitalism in a later session. But in this one ask the group to draw on their memories. First, of the depression itself.

And, towards the end, you can ask the questions that will bring out the long service of some of our leaders. Ask them if they remember when the CCF first ran candidates, when it first elected members, who were the members elected. Somebody will probably remember. If they don't, then you can tell them.

So go at a paragraph at a time, get general discussion from the group as much as possible.

There are some condensed background facts at the end, including a biographical note about Woodsworth, who had so much to do with the founding of the CCF.

It would be hard to say just when the CCF began. Those 131 men and women who went as delegates to the first national convention at Regina in 1933 were the ones who gave final form to the Regina Manifesto and shaped the Constitution of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. But behind them was the work of the delegates who had met at Calgary in 1932 and who had agreed on first principles and planned the draft of the Manifesto and Constitution. And earlier than these people were the pioneers in Farm and Labour and Socialist organizations. The seeds of their ideas had come from many lands where even earlier pioneers had given their lives to nurture the first struggling growth of democracy.

Question: Do you know about these early socialist organizations in Canada?

A number of factors made the Calgary Convention possible. The Great Depression was at its worst in the winter of 1932. In every city from Halifax to Victoria, families on relief huddled in cold houses, hungry and miserable. Men tramped the streets looking in vain for work. Farmers watched their prices fall to unbelievably low levels, while their debts skyrocketed and their farms were seized by banks and mortgage companies. Small business firms died like flies that winter. Youth rode the boxcars or wasted at home in idleness and frustration. At Ottawa the Bennett Government sat tight and waited for prosperity to round the corner. For the first time in Canada large numbers of people had begun seriously to question the basis of the economic and social order.

Questions: What do you remember about the depression? Why do you think it happened? Could the Government have done anything about it?

For years J.S. Woodsworth, M.P. for Winnipeg North Centre, had dreamed and worked for the time when a new political party could be formed in Canada, a Socialist Party which would combine organized labour, organized farmers, and men and women in other walks of life. Their bond would be their determination to work for a new society where all men and women, regardless of who they are or where they live, will have equal opportunity for the good things of life.

Since 1921, when he was first elected to the House of Commons, J.S. Woodsworth had drawn together into a working team the two or three Labour members and the dozen farmer members known as the Ginger Group. In 1932 the Labour M.P.s included himself, A.A. Heaps, (Wm. Irvine had been there earlier), and Angus MacInnis. The Farmer M.P.s included people like Agnes McPhail (first woman M.P.), Henry Spencer (now of Comox, B.C.), Robert Gardiner (then President of the United Farmers of Alberta), R.J. Garland, and others.

In the winter of 1932 the League for Social Reconstruction (L.S.R.) had been formed by some of the younger lecturers at McGill and Toronto Universities. It was intended to be a Canadian Fabian Society which would assist a political Socialist party by research and educational work. Some of its prominent members were Prof. F.H. Underhill who had a very large share in preparing the draft of the Regina Manifesto, Prof. F.R. Scott of the Law Faculty at McGill and for many years National Chairman of the CCF, Dr. Eugene Forsey who has long been Research Director of the Canadian Congress of Labour.

Question: What do you know about Woodsworth? (There is a biographical note about him at the back of this booklet).

In January 1932 the annual convention of the United Farmers of Alberta issued an open invitation to groups of like mind to meet with them later in the year to discuss the establishment in Canada of a co-operative commonwealth. J.S.Woodsworth and the Labour-Farmer caucus prepared to give leadership to such a meeting. That summer there were several Farmer and Labour Conferences on the prairies, ending in the one which met on August 1st in the Calgary Labour Temple to form the CCF.

Delegates came from British Columbia on the west and from as far east as Ottawa. From that city came A.R. Mosher, representing the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees. His interest in political action for organized labour goes back a long way.

A full list of the occupations of the delegates shows a typical cross-section of Canadian life. There were 15 farmers, 20 construction workers, 2 lawyers, 6 teachers, 1 miner, 1 professor, 6 housewives, 3 accountants, 6 railway workers, 3 journalists, 2 steam engineers, 1 hotel keeper, 1 retired minister, 1 merchant, 1 motion picture operator, 3 nurses, 2 union executives, 12 members of Parliament and the Legislatures, 19 unemployed men and women. Together they possessed a practical knowledge of the needs of the working people of this country.

Question: Do you know what organizations met there at Calgary? (There is a note on this in the back pages of this booklet).

A name for the new movement came up early for discussion. Many were proposed. One after another they were discarded because they did not include all the elements necessary. "The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation" was suggested by two delegates, Walter Mentz of Edmonton and John Fenstein of Regina, the latter proposing that the words "Farmer-Labour-Socialist" should appear under the name. After much discussion his suggestion was adopted.

The Resolutions Committee, chaired by M.J. Coldwell, brought in a draft program which finally emerged as an eight point document. It was this document which was worked over by L.S.R. and other committees and which the following summer became the basis of the Regina Manifesto.

Question: Why was it called the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, and not Co-operative Commonwealth Party? Was it a Federation? When did it become a party with individual membership? (See note in back pages)

Do you think it is better to have individual membership? *****

Between Calgary and Regina Conventions much organization work was done and the 1933 Convention represented a large body of people. Apart from the drafting of the Regina Manifesto which was done exceedingly thoroughly by the delegates, the highlight of that Convention was the speech of the man elected first National President of the CCF - J.S. Woodsworth. Because it embodied so much of the spirit of the Regina Manifesto, here are a few important sentences from this address:

"The CCF is essentially a drawing together of the common people."

"Thanks to the pioneers in the Socialist and Co-operative movements, we have at least the fundamental principles on which we may base our teachings with regard to the Co-operative Commonwealth."

Question: What do you think those principles are? (Don't go too far into this - the Regina Manifesto will be dealt with in a later booklet).

"We do not believe in unchanging social dogma. Society is not static."

Question: What does this mean?

"Undoubtedly we should profit by the experience of other nations and other times, but personally I believe that we in Canada must work out our own salvation in our own way...I am convinced that we may develop in Canada a distinctive type of Socialism."

Question: Why did he say this?

"The CCF advocates peaceful and orderly methods. In this we distinguish ourselves sharply from the Communist Party which envisages the new social order as being ushered in by violent upheaval and the establishment of a dictatorship."

Question: Do you agree that we have already achieved a great deal by peaceful and orderly methods?

"An intelligent and alert citizenship is the only guarantee of freedom."

Question: Why? And how do we ensure an intelligent and alert citizenship. Could we achieve socialism without it?

"If our movement is to be successful it must bear - as we think it does - something of the character of a religious crusade. Only thus can we overcome the danger of being swayed by the hope of immediate success. Only thus can we rally the masses to struggle for a better future for themselves and their children."

Question: Do you agree with this?

Is our strongest appeal that of working for more material things or for what is right and moral?

Chairman winds up

Having gone through this booklet, the chairman should wind up with a little speech, summing up the material presented, and preparing them for the next session, which will be on the structure of the CCF, explaining why it is a democratic party, and how it works.

The following pages contain background facts, which the chairman can introduce during the discussion.

Reading Matter:

For those interested in the history of the CCF, we recommend the new book by Grace MacInnis:

"J.S. WOODSWORTH...

A MAN TO REMEMBER" - \$4.50 per copy.
Obtainable at 712 Holden Building, Vancouver.

"COMMENT" of August 1953.

Price 10¢ per copy or \$1.00 per year.

A FEW MORE FACTS.....

Organizations Represented at Calgary, 1932.

The United Farmers of Alberta.

The Canadian Labour Party (Alberta)

The Dominion Labour Party (Alberta)

The Socialist Party of Canada (B.C.)

The Saskatchewan Labour Party

The United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section)

The Independent Labour Party (Manitoba)

The Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees

The League for Social Reconstruction.

From Federation to Individual Membership

The CCF began as a federation of organizations.

A person took out membership by joining one of these affiliates. For example, British Columbia's charter organization was the Socialist Party of Canada and a person wishing to join the CCF took out membership in the S.P. of C.

Pressure for individual membership in the CCF grew, following the Calgary Convention in 1932. Particularly in Ontario, CCF clubs sprang up spontaneously. In British Columbia the process was almost as swift and the Associated CCF Clubs soon made a second section of the movement.

From Federation to Individual Membership -cont'd.
In 1935 a joint convention of Socialist Party of Canada and Associated CCF Clubs agreed that hence- in this province the movement would consist of a single body known as the CCF, with direct membership on an individual basis.

First CCF Election Results:

1933 -- in British Columbia the CCF won 7 seats and 31 percent of the total vote, becoming the Official Opposition.

M.L.A's elected included Harold and Ernie Winch.

1934 -- in Saskatchewan the CCF won 5 seats and 25 percent of the total vote, becoming the Official Opposition.

1934 -- (continued)

In Ontario the CCF elected 1 candidate.

1935 -- in the Federal Election the CCF elected 7 M.P.s., among whom were J.S.Woodsworth, Angus MacInnis, M.J.Coldwell, T.C.Douglas, Grant MacNeil.

Biographical Note about J.S. Woodsworth.

Born near Toronto in 1894, James was the eldest of six children of Rev. James Woodsworth, a Methodist Minister. When he was 8, the family moved to Manitoba. He graduated from Wesley College, Winnipeg, in 1899 and then had a year's further preparation for the Ministry at Victoria College, Toronto.

A year's postgraduate study at Oxford made him aware for the first time of the problems of the people who live in the slums of great cities - and, by extension, of all underprivileged people.

Returning to Canada, James soon found his interest turning from preaching to social service work, first among the immigrants then pouring into North Winnipeg, then in wider and wider circles across Canada. Employed by the governments of the three prairie provinces to head a Bureau of Social Research, he was dismissed in 1916 for his outspoken opposition to measures which he feared would lead to conscription.

J.S.Woodsworth - cont'd.

Two years later he resigned from the Methodist Church, largely through his opposition to the war. At that time he and the family were at Gibson's Landing near Vancouver. Seeking employment, he found it on the Vancouver waterfront, learning at first hand the problems of the industrial worker.

In 1919 he became involved in the Winnipeg Strike and was arrested on sedition charges which included two verses from Isaiah. He was never brought to trial. In the federal election of 1921 he was elected to the House of Commons as member for Winnipeg North Centre, a district which he represented until his death in 1942.

In Parliament, over the years, he was instrumental in welding together the handful of Labour and "Ginger Group" Farmer members. Together they forced the Liberal Government to put Old Age Pensions on the statute books and focussed public attention in other much-needed legislation. A convinced socialist, J.S. Woodsworth put great emphasis on the need for social ownership and control of the productive resources of the community.

Labour-Farmer co-operation led to the formation of the CCF at Calgary in 1932 when economic conditions were ripe. J.S. Woodsworth became the first National President of the CCF, remaining its leader until his death.
